

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE Feb. 28, 2008

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WASHINGTON-The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom commends President George W. Bush for pledging Thursday that while attending the Summer Olympic Games in China, he will raise concerns about freedom of religion in China with President Hu Jintao. The Commission urges President Bush to request to meet with prisoners and persons detained by the state because of their exercise of freedom of religion or advocacy of this and related human rights and to attend an "unregistered" church-underlining the Chinese government's violations of religious freedom by its efforts to control faith.

"Notably, President Bush has repeatedly raised religious freedom concerns with the President of China. It is important that this continue. During his visit to Beijing this summer, we urge the President to stress, in both private conversations and public action, that protecting

religious freedom means more than just allowing worship.

It also means individuals must enjoy the freedom of expression and association, as well as the right to choose their own leaders and freely educate their children in the principles of their religion," said Commission Chair Michael Cromartie.

"President Bush has made of point of meeting the Dalai Lama and unregistered Protestant leaders at the White House.

While in Beijing we urge him to visit an unregistered Protestant church and Goeden Choekyi Nyima, the Dalai Lama-selected Panchen Lama, who has been held incommunicado for 12 years. The President should also seek the immediate and unconditional release of imprisoned Roman Catholic bishops and priests, unregistered Protestant leaders, Tibetan Buddhists, and Uighur Muslims."

The United States has designated China a "country of particular concern" since 1999 for its systematic and egregious violations of freedom of religion or belief. All religious groups in China face various restrictions, monitoring, and surveillance.

In recent years, religious freedom conditions have further deteriorated for communities not affiliated with one of the seven government-approved religious organizations, and for those closely associated with ethnic minority groups or considered by the government to be "cults";

Religious communities that have been targeted in particular include Uighur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, "unregistered" Roman Catholics and Protestants, and various spiritual movements such as Falun Gong. Prominent religious leaders and adherents alike have been confined, tortured, "disappeared," imprisoned, or subjected to other forms of ill treatment on account of their religion or belief. More than 600 "house church" Protestants have been detained and arrested by police in the last year. Ov

Over the past two years, China has also targeted for arrest and harassment dozens of human rights activists, lawyers, and others who attempted to use the Chinese legal system to defend the rights of Chinese citizens, including those who sought to manifest their right to freedom of religion.

"President Bush has an opportunity to express the United States' concern about the repression of religious belief and practice in China and show solidarity with the suffering. His visit to the Olympic games allows him a platform to articulate again that China's future is best assured not with the repression or suspicions of the past, but in the full protection of the

fundamental freedom and rights of the Chinese people.

U.S.-China relations will improve vastly as a result," Cromartie said.

In order to raise the profile of religious freedom and related human rights promotion through the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, the Commission has urged the U.S. Congress to

- within funds appropriated for the security of U.S. citizens in Beijing during the 2008 Olympic Games, allocate sufficient resources to ensure that training and related information materials include content that:

- instructs security officials, Olympic spectators, and athletes regarding China's commitments to uphold for all visitors certain internationally recognized human rights standards during the Olympic Games; and

- informs U.S. citizens, participants, and spectators at the Olympic games of their rights protected under international law and identifies problem areas they may encounter with Chinese authorities, relating to the freedoms of expression, religion or belief, assembly, and association, including information on Chinese law and recent human rights practices of the Chinese government on these issues; and

- in order to promote a free and open environment, in concert with the principles of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the standards of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, designate appropriate funding to independent human rights organizations to monitor and report on human rights conditions during the summer games to ensure that the Chinese government is in compliance with relevant commitments made to the IOC to uphold human rights and international standards during the Summer Olympics.

The Commission on International Religious Freedom, a bipartisan, independent federal body, is mandated by Congress to monitor abuse of freedom of religion or belief and related human

rights around the world and to make recommendations to the President, State Department and Congress on ways to address religious freedom concerns.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and the Congress.

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